Interview with Sally Shelton-Colby

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AMBASSADOR SALLY SHELTON-COLBY

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Q: I wonder if you could give me first a little bit of your background. Where did you come from? I'm talking about early on, born and educated and that sort of thing.

SHELTON-COLBY: Is that really of interest to anyone?

Q: Yes, it is, because I think people, when they're reading these transcripts, want to have an idea who's talking.

SHELTON-COLBY: I was born in San Antonio, Texas. My Mexican friends say I'm really Mexican, because I was born in tierra robada, stolen territory. Grew up in a very, very small town in Missouri. And I wanted to be an ambassador from the time I was eleven or twelve years old.

Q: How could you actually even know that?

SHELTON-COLBY: How could I even know what an ambassador was all about? I really didn't know very much of what an ambassador was about, except when I was about that age, twelve, I read the book that in a way perhaps changed my life: Diplomat Among

Warriors, by Robert Murphy. I was always an avid reader, and I wanted to do what he had done—I wanted to change the world. And it never occurred to me to think that (a) a woman couldn't do what he had done, or (b) that someone from my very, very modest and insular background couldn't do that. I then read a second book, with which I'm sure if I read the book now I would have very strong disagreement, it was called The Nation of Sheep.

Q: Was it William Lederer?

SHELTON-COLBY: Exactly. Exactly. And frankly I don't remember all that much about the book right now except that it opened my still very young mind—again, I was eleven, twelve years old—to the fact that there was a world out there and there were challenges to U.S. security and different ways of dealing with these challenges. And from that time on, I decided I really had to get involved in this business of international affairs.

My mother was extremely encouraging; basically told me that I could do anything I wanted to do, but I was going to have to work to get it. Which was no problem, I'd been a workaholic from the time I was very little.

So all of my educational background was really focused on achieving that goal of becoming an ambassador. And I did French and Italian as an undergraduate, did the honors' program in both.

Q: Where?

SHELTON-COLBY: I went to the Southern Methodist University, and wasn't really all that satisfied with the program, so I transferred to the University of Missouri. You know, as I said, I grew up in Missouri, and I had thought along the way that perhaps I should do some work in journalism, and the Missouri University has a very, very fine journalism school. But I decided that I really should get as strong a background in languages and the social sciences as I could, and if I did decide to spend some time, on the route to becoming an ambassador, being a foreign correspondent, I could learn the sort of mechanics of it

later. So I really focused; as I say, I majored in French and did the honors' program, and minored in Italian and did the honors' program.

And then I had a great crisis between my junior and senior year, when I suddenly began to realize that language was a tool. You had to be able to say something in another language, something of value, something of import. And I had done almost nothing but French and Italian. And, of course, as you will remember from your own time in school, back in those days, when you studied a language, you studied the literature.

Q: Yes, you read.

SHELTON-COLBY: And when I spent a year reading and studying Dante's Inferno in the original Italian...

Q: Which was mid-Italian.

SHELTON-COLBY: Which is as much Latin as it is Italian, and having grown up in parochial schools, I had enough Latin that I could do it. I thought, What on earth is going to be the use of reading Dante in the original Italian, except to be able to say that I'd done it, but how's that going to help me solve the world's problems? So the point is that my senior year I did no more language; I had done all of my course requirements. And I did as much economics, diplomatic history, and world politics as I could cram into one year. And I got enough under my belt, and I suppose it was an interesting enough combination—the French and the Italian on the one hand, and all of this political science and economics on the other hand—that I was able to get into the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Q: Known as SAIS.

SHELTON-COLBY: Known as SAIS. And I also got one of three fellowships given each year by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to go to SAIS's center in Bologna, Italy. I

mean, here I had come out of nowhere. I grew up in a town of six thousand people, and I'd done the cheerleader route, homecoming and all the rest of it, and from a very, very, very modest family, who sometimes didn't have enough to eat. But I worked. I borrowed the money to go to college, and my parents helped where they could, mostly with enormous love and moral support, but not very much financial support, they just couldn't. I worked my way through college, which was fine. More kids should be doing that today. Look at some students today, with their VCRs and their TVs and their computers and their cars, and I think, it doesn't hurt to work a little bit and put your way through. It builds character. But, in any event, I suppose every generation says that.

In any event, I did a year in Bologna, and then the second year of the SAIS program in Washington, and did an MA in international relations. And then I was offered a Fulbright to the Institut de Science, Politique, in Paris, and went off to Paris to do a project on Vietnam; as matter of fact, French-Vietnam relations since Dien Bien Phu.

Q: I'd like to talk a little about the Institut de Science Politique. When did you go there?

SHELTON-COLBY: Sixty-eight.

Q: What was your impression? This was one of the major institutes of this very structured French system for training leaders and all this. What was your impression of it when you were there?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was, and still is, one of the finest schools in France, of course. I felt a bit an outsider, frankly, being an American there. It was very hard to really integrate with the French students beyond simply living in the world of foreign students. And I felt I failed to really penetrate into the French student body, if you will. I spent a lot of my time in the library, because I was really trying to understand how the French had been able to develop a reasonably decent relationship with the Vietnamese, coming from where they come from, and especially after the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in the mid-'50s. And I was

trying to figure out whether this was a unique case or whether there was some kind of a model here that might apply to the U.S. in its relations with some countries.

Q: Because our commitment to Vietnam was at its height at this point.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, exactly. But I was really working a lot. Why did I go to Science Po? I think back now, and I think, well, I'm not totally sure, except that some of the great names in French academia were there: Jean Baptiste Duroselle, and then Alfred Grosser, and some others. And, of course, they have one of the best libraries in France. And it seemed to be the most appropriate place for me to go for my Fulbright.

In any event, after I left, after I did the Fulbright, which I had to cut short, I went to live in Mexico where I lived from '69 to '71. I was teaching (substitute for a Mexican professor) at two universities in Mexico: the Ibero-American University and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, a course on Vietnam at UNAM, and a course on U.S. foreign policy at the Ibero-Americana.

During the period that I lived in Mexico, I had a very interesting experience, which really has, I would have to say, shaped the rest of my life and perhaps contributed in large part to my being named ambassador at a fairly young age. I married a Mexican politician, whom I had met at SAIS. My husband was very much involved in politics. He had worked for President Lopez Mateos.

Q: He was part of the PRI.

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes. His entire family was in politics. His father was a general in the Mexican Army. The marriage was unsuccessful, but from a professional point of view it was absolutely fascinating, because I had an experience which most foreigners don't ever get to have, and that is, I had a bird's eye view into the inner workings of the Mexican political system. Coming in and out of my parents-in-law's house were many of the politicians who are in office today, as very young people at the time. We constantly

had Mexican military officers in and out of the house, because of my father-in-law. And my husband's family was a supernationalistic, anti-American family. Now this was very hard for me as a young woman who went there without speaking Spanish, although I had French and Italian, and I began to pick Spanish up very quickly. But it was very difficult. It was really, really, really rough and perhaps contributed to the breakdown of the very brief marriage. But I learned Spanish quickly. I learned to understand the way Mexicans think about themselves and about the United States. Mexico has a very unique culture. Perhaps that could be said about most cultures, but Mexico is very special in many, many ways. And they have their hangups about the United States.

Q: Oh, yes.

SHELTON-COLBY: (I'm trying to be diplomatic, as you can see.) And I was immersed in it. And this was, of course, at the height of our involvement in Vietnam, which exacerbated some of the anti-American tendencies in Mexico. I learned an enormous amount about how Mexicans think about the United States and their particular relationship with the United States.

After two years, I left and came back to the United States, and was very fortunate to get a job, almost sight- unseen, with Senator Lloyd Bentsen.

Q: Before we get into that, I'd like to go back to the Mexican experience, because I think this was very important. Were you teaching Americans who came down?

SHELTON-COLBY: No, I was teaching Mexicans.

Q: How did you approach them, discussing American foreign policy? Because it seems in many ways, from my other interviews and all, that there is a remarkable, really, integration of the economy between the United States and Mexico, which just doesn't have anything to do with formal relations. It's there. And there is much more interchange, you might say, people-to-people, economy-to-economy.

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes, there is.

Q: But when you get to something particularly in the field of foreign affairs, Mexico, almost even more than, say, the French, has taken delight in going the opposite way from the United States, for whatever purpose. This must have been a very interesting atmosphere. Could you talk a bit about your dealings with the...

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, to the extent that I can remember, yes, I'd be happy to. Today, of course, all that is changing. I mean, increasingly, U.S.-Mexican interests are coinciding, and I think will continue to do so in the 1990s. But this was twenty years ago and a very, very, difficult period. And, of course, again, it was exacerbated by Vietnam. I don't know what I can tell you beyond what has already been written in a voluminous number of books on the subject. But the whole society seemed to be permeated with anti-Americanism.

Now there are really two Mexicos. There is the Mexico of the north and the Mexico of the center and south. The Mexico of the north has always been much more oriented towards the United States, much more focused on the economic links, much more interested in a closer political relationship with the United States, much more culturally attuned to the United States than the central part of Mexico, which is, of course, where Mexico City is.

It's almost, as I say, as though there were two Mexicos. But I was teaching in Mexico City, and, of course, the UNAM has traditionally been a kind of hotbed of anti-U.S. sentiment. And it was very tough (a) to be an American, and (b) to be teaching U.S. foreign policy.

For example, I remember that my Mexican students could be...I mean, it's almost trite to say this, but sometimes even trite statements need to be repeated. There was constantly a mindset that the United States was out to keep the rest of the world repressed, poor, and under their control, and that went in spades for the developing countries. And you simply could not reason with these students. You could not argue specifically that there were security problems, that there were areas in which there were threats to democracy, that

there were threats to Western economic systems, coming from either the Soviets or the Chinese. The Mexican students simply did not accept those arguments.

Of course, they tended to argue that Vietnam was nothing but a civil war, and that if the U.S. and others would just pull out, then they would peaceably settle their differences and everyone would live happily ever after. I mean, this, remember, was '69-'70 when I taught the course on Vietnam. (Technically it was Indochina, but Vietnam was all I ever taught.) And, you know, this is not the first time that you will have heard these kinds of arguments, but to face them every day in class...I don't even remember, I guess I taught three times a week, it was tough. I felt I made, frankly, no headway in trying to overcome some of these mindsets. And there was also a mindset that the negotiations were never taken seriously by the United States; the only priority we put was on the military, the military priority.

You could not have a dialogue with these students. I felt I was talking at them rather than talking with them.

Q: Was this coming from the professors, too?

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes, very much, very much, yes. And from the politicians. I mean, it was everywhere in Mexico.

Q: Looking at it at that time, was this Marxist or was this Mexicanist?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was Mexicanist, although I think there were some people that were very far left on the political spectrum. I would not go so far, however, to say that people had any particular soft spots in their heart for the Chinese and for the Soviets. I think it was more anti-American than it was pro-communism.

Q: How about Cuba at the time? Here was a non-democracy if there ever was a non-democracy. Could they deal with...?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, I didn't really get into Cuba in my course. But certainly, just during the time that I was living in Mexico, there was a feeling that the problems of Cuba were caused by U.S. policy, particularly by the blockade, and that if we just gave Fidel a fair hearing, we would be able to resolve our differences, and Cuba, of course, was the future of Latin America. I didn't believe it then, and I don't believe it now. But that was the mindset, and it was very difficult to live and work in this kind of atmosphere.

Q: But it also gave you, in a way, a mindset, or at least a feel for this area.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, it gave me a feel for the kind of thinking that I would have to deal with years later when I was in the U.S. government. It was a tough learning experience, but it was an extremely useful one.

Q: Also, really, the intractability of certain problems.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, exactly, of certain ideas and certain individuals.

Q: Well, then, in 1971 you went to work for Senator Bentsen of Texas.

SHELTON-COLBY: Who had been newly elected, Democrat from Texas, and he was looking for someone to do foreign policy for him. And he particularly wanted someone who knew Mexico, for obvious reasons, since he's from Texas. And I seemed to be the right person, so I went to work for him and did foreign policy and a variety of other issues for him from '71 to '77.

Q: I'd like to have you talk a little about your experience on a Senator's staff, dealing with foreign relations. As sort of the foreign relations person on a senator's staff, what sort of things would you be doing?

SHELTON-COLBY: For the first two years there wasn't a great deal to do. He was on Senate Armed Services, but there was another person who did the Armed Services

Committee work. And I didn't have an especially strong background in military affairs, nor did I have a particular interest in military affairs at the time; it grew subsequently. But basically what I would do would be to advise him on whatever issue relative to foreign affairs that came up in the Senate.

And this was a very exciting period, because it was at a time when votes on Vietnam were constantly coming up, primarily dealing with appropriations for Vietnam, and, increasingly, efforts to cut off those appropriations. But also it was a time when the Congress began to feel that it had ceded a great deal of authority to the Executive Branch, and the Congress began to try to reassert itself in the foreign policy decision-making process, through the War Powers Act and other legislation.

Q: This was, of course, the Nixon Administration.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, it was the Nixon Administration. And, if you'll remember, Senator Case, a Republican from New Jersey, began to try to deal with this issue of the cession of power to the Executive Branch. He and others began to try to recoup some of that power, in the beginning, through efforts to require that certain kinds of Executive agreements be submitted to the Congress for its approval. The Nixon Administration began to try to submit international agreements not as treaties, which would be subject to Senate confirmation, but rather as Executive agreements, which were not subject to congressional or even Senate ratification. There were some agreements relative to Vietnam and other potentially controversial international issues that were sent up to the Hill as Executive agreements. There was an effort, led by Senator Case but sponsored by a number of other members as well, to try to get some control over international agreements that were sent up as Executive agreements, not as treaties. This was part and parcel of the whole procedure during these years, the early and mid-'70s, in which the Congress was trying, as I said, to reassert itself in the foreign-policy-making process.

You may recall also that President Nixon began the procedure, which heretofore had not really existed, of impounding funds for programs that he didn't like. This was primarily in the domestic arena, but some of them were in the international arena. When the Congress became aware of the fact that they were passing funding for programs which the Executive was then impounding, they got very upset. And, of course, we then got into the issue as to whether the Congress could force the Executive to spend money that the Congress had appropriated. So, again, this was part of the Congress's effort to try to get more actively involved in the foreign policy process.

It was also a period, in the early '70s, when the Congress began to deal with the war powers issue. Senator Bentsen, early on (it was his first major piece of legislation), introduced the War Powers Act. So did about half a dozen other senators. And, of course, that subsequently became law. And it was an effort, by the Senate particularly but by the House as well, to try to limit the ability of the president to go to war without a specific declaration of war.

So there were any number of issues in which Bentsen was very interested and very involved to try to reassert the Congress's role in the foreign-policy-making process.

Q: Well, now, as far as you were concerned, how did you view, at that point, the people at the State Department? Did you feel that they were, in a way, the enemy camp?

SHELTON-COLBY: No. No. On the contrary. I had taken the Foreign Service exam and passed it, both the written and the oral, but because I had gotten the Fulbright, I decided not to go into the Foreign Service. I decided that the Fulbright would not come along again, and regarding the Foreign Service, I could presumably take the exam again later. And frankly I was troubled by the Vietnam War, and I wasn't, at the time, supportive of the Vietnam War. I've subsequently done a hundred and eighty degree switch, but, at the time, I was caught up in the antiwar fervor, to be honest with you. So I didn't go into the Foreign Service. But there was always a big part of my head and heart that was still in

the Executive Branch, in spite of the fact that I was working for the Senator. And I felt that these were people that we needed to work with, not against. I worked very closely with any number of people at State, whom I consider to this very day to be good friends of mine, and I felt that we were all in this together. I never felt the antagonistic attitude that some of the people I work with in the Congress today feel, because I felt that we should all be pulling together to protect the U.S. national interest. But, institutionally, I did feel that the Congress was doing the right thing in its effort to reassert itself in the policy process. The question is: What's the proper balance?

Q: Also, one of the phenomena that arose in that time and later has been the growth of the congressional staff. And one hears that it has almost a policy of its own. These are people without the legislative responsibility, but the support responsibility. How did you find, when you were there, those who were doing similar jobs to you? Did you sit around and concoct policy or what have you? How did you operate?

SHELTON-COLBY: Let me say I think this whole idea that there's a big powerful congressional staff that's not really accountable to anyone has been grossly overblown, even today. There are some very powerful staffers, but they have power only to the extent that their member of Congress will accept their recommendations. I have seen any number of cases where the congressional staff are perceived outside as being all-powerful, yet the member of Congress for whom they work doesn't necessarily go along with their policy recommendations, doesn't necessarily have the same view, even, of a given issue. So I think there's a tendency on the outside to exaggerate the degree of power that staffs have. But at the same time, one should not minimize the amount of power the staffs have, either. You have only as much power as your member of Congress gives you. I was always very careful to make sure that I was doing what Bentsen wanted me to do. I was not going to waste my time working on a given issue that I thought he wasn't interested in. And I worked very closely with him to make sure that I was representing his views fairly and

accurately. Now the role here of a staffer can be extraordinarily important, because, in the great majority of cases, the member of Congress doesn't have a view on a given issue.

Q: And doesn't have time.

SHELTON-COLBY: And doesn't have time to look into it, so staff researches it.

I was listening to the news a couple of nights ago, it was the twentieth anniversary of Turkey invading Cyprus. I remember so well, when the Greek-American community in this country was mobilized (and we've got a lot of them in Texas) and they started deluging Senator Bentsen's office with phone calls and telegrams and letters and visits to cut off aid to Turkey. What was Bentsen's view? I researched the issue. The colonels were in power in Greece at the time, and the Greeks had tried to influence the course of events in Cyprus. Out of fear that the Greeks would invade Cyprus, the Turks had come in first. Both of them were NATO allies. I had to research this very carefully for Senator Bentsen and then make a policy recommendation to him as to what he should do.

Q: Just to give a feel for this, how did you research it?

SHELTON-COLBY: I talked with the State Department a great deal. I was on the phone with the State Department and the U.S. Defense Department constantly. I also spoke with Greek-Americans and Turkish-Americans. And I used the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress a great deal to look at what the precedents had been for U.S. policy towards Greece and Turkey, for example. President Lyndon Johnson had written a letter to the Turks which the Turks were using to argue against a cutoff of aid. So I had to go back a bit into history and look at what commitments had been made to both the Greeks, as well as the Turks, and how those commitments were interpreted by both sides.

You don't have a whole lot of time to do research when you've got literally three, four hundred calls and letters and telegrams a day that you've got to be responsive to, and a vote coming up in an hour that you've got to advise the Senator on.

One of the interesting things that you get involved in on the Hill, and which present and future scholars should really look at very closely, are the domestic determinants of U.S. foreign policy. I think too many people in the Foreign Service, and too many scholars, tend to look at the external determinants of our foreign policy, and we don't focus enough on the domestic determinants.

The voices of the Greek-Americans and the Turkish-Americans who were lobbying Senator Bentsen to vote a particular way on the issue of cutting off aid to Turkey were vitally important determinants of why the Congress voted to cut off aid to Turkey. The Greek-Americans were mobilized, almost overnight, and, led by Gene Rosides, who at the time was a senior Treasury Department official. Here was a senior Treasury Department official lobbying me, a very lowly legislative assistant to a senator, but of course he was of Greek background. I don't remember what position Gene had, but it was a fairly senior position, and overnight the Greek-American community in this country turned from a cultural organization to a politically engaged organization. And that's what did it, the Turks invading Cyprus. And the Greeks tended to be far more organized than the Turkish-Americans.

Q: Well, there really isn't much of a Turkish...

SHELTON-COLBY: There is not much of a Turkish-American community; they've never been very organized, or at least at the time, again, this was twenty years ago. But they bombarded me with information and with pressure. And Bentsen voted to cut off aid to Turkey. And it was not an easy vote for him, because, again, both countries were members of NATO.

But it was a fantastic experience, in looking at the relative role of domestic pressures versus the relative role of external pressures, in understanding why the Congress did what it did.

Q: I just finished a series of interviews with a man, Wells Stabler, who was an assistant secretary for European Affairs, or a deputy assistant.

SHELTON-COLBY: I think he was a DAS.

Q: Deputy assistant secretary, who was dealing with a problem. He said he talked to one congressman from Maryland, trying to get him not to vote for cutoff of funds, and the congressman said, "I agree with you absolutely, but my chief money-raiser is a Greek-American, and I'm going to vote for it."

SHELTON-COLBY: That's a wonderful example, which synthesizes this issue, the conflict between the domestic versus the external.

But, as I say, the point to keep in mind is the Greek-Americans organized, and the Turkish-Americans did not. And the Greek-Americans, frankly, were farther up the socio-economic ladder than the Turkish-Americans, and therefore they could use the power of money. Which, again, argues for public financing of campaigns, but that's another issue.

In any event, these were the kinds of issues that I got involved with.

Then, in '73, the Senator went on to the Senate Finance Committee, which of course has jurisdiction over trade. So that got me involved in trade legislation. I was involved in the 1974 Trade Act, which was the first big trade act of the '70s.

So, one of the interesting things about working on the Hill is that you work on a variety of different issues, from NATO to international trade, and you have to deal with issues ranging from security to international economics.

Now, in addition to foreign policy, I did a number of other issues for Bentsen: campaign finance reform, electoral reform, consumer issues, and a host of others. And that was good experience for anyone who wants to make a career in public policy, because you do need to know something about domestic issues if you're going to effectively represent your country. It was absolutely fascinating. Of course, at the time, I really only wanted to work on foreign policy, and I never, in a million years, would have thought that some of the domestic issues I was working on at the time, such as campaign finance reform, would be of interest. But years later, one of the Prime Ministers of the countries to which I was accredited asked me many questions about campaign finance reform, which I was able to answer, frankly, because I had worked on it in Bentsen's office.

Anyway, these were years of tremendous ferment in the world as well as tremendous ferment in the relationship between the Congress and the Executive Branch. And then, of course, the background of Watergate in those years, and Vietnam, really put the spotlight on the Congress in a way that it hadn't before. Let's also not forget that Senator Fulbright was chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and he put the Senate in the spotlight. Then, of course, there were the hearings into Watergate and the CIA and all that. Of course, my husband was testifying constantly. I think he probably spent more time on the Hill than he did at the CIA in those years.

Q: Your husband is William Colby, who was at that point the head of the CIA.

SHELTON-COLBY: Director of Central Intelligence.

Q: But you weren't married at that time.

SHELTON-COLBY: No.

Q: How did you come to move over to the Executive Branch?

SHELTON-COLBY: Because of Texas contiguity to Mexico, and because of my own personal interest in Mexico and having lived in Mexico at that time and having acquired Spanish, I kept an eye on Mexico during those years. From time to time, the Senator would go to Mexico and he'd meet with the president or governors, or he'd meet with them when they would come here. Interestingly, we would complain during those years of how closed the Mexican economy was. It was very difficult for his Texas constituents to be able to penetrate the Mexican market, because of very high tariffs and a whole plethora of non-tariff barriers. It's changed dramatically since then.

I worked very closely with people in the State Department on all of the issues that the senator had to vote on, because I felt it was essential that he be informed as to what the Administration's position was. I went beyond Congressional Relations; I would call people on the Desk and talk with them, because sometimes I didn't find that people in “H” really had as much information about a given issue as I needed.

Q: Well, just a question here. If you want to find something about a country, why go to Congressional Relations?

SHELTON-COLBY: Because that's what you were supposed to do. I mean, that was the procedure. And the “H” people, would get their nose out of joint if you didn't go to them.

Q: That's right, but, in a way, that really isn't the place to go, is it?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, that's what you're supposed to do. I mean, that's why there's an “H,” for people on the Hill to call them and say, Look, such and such an issue is coming up, what's your position? I just took the initiative and developed some personal friendships on the Desk. And also, look, don't forget that sometimes a constituent of the Senator's would have a problem in some foreign country, in which case I'd go to the Desk, and I would work with the consular people in the country in question, through the Desk.

And let me just say a word for the consular people, who I think by and large are fabulous people. You generally tend to hear the stories of the consular officers who weren't very helpful. Well, I have had a wholly different set of experiences. I cannot remember an occasion when consular officers did not really bend over backwards to be helpful to American citizens. And I'm sure it didn't hurt for the office of a member of Congress to express interest. But I remember one particular incident where a constituent of the senator's had been in a car wreck, in the Yucat#n, as it turned out. The consular officer there absolutely went overboard to be helpful, really went above and beyond the call of duty. There was more than one case like that. I just have little patience for people who badmouth consular officers, because my experience has been a very positive one.

Q: Well, as a professional consular officer, I know the badmouthing comes with the trade. When things go wrong, you've got to blame somebody. It's often not the fault of the consular officer at all, but you have to blame somebody, and there's no point in blaming either one's stupidity or foreign officials if you can blame an American.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right. Unfortunately there is a tendency (I suppose it's just human nature) to lash out and find somebody to blame.

But the main point I want to make is that I found that I could be most helpful to the senator when I had the best possible information. And that meant working with the Executive Branch, not working against them. And, sure, they would try to lobby me to lobby the senator to do X, Y, or Z; that's fine, they were protecting their particular interest. I frequently agreed with them. I felt that the senator had to know what the Administration's position was. Frankly, I felt that it didn't hurt if there were differences within the Executive Branch on a given issue. Bentsen had to have the fullest array of information, and then he would take the decision. Now he would frequently ask me what my point of view was, and sometimes he accepted my point of view, and sometimes he didn't. But he had to have the information, and then he took the decision.

Q: Well, then, coming to...

SHELTON-COLBY: Oh, how did I get into the Executive Branch. When Carter was elected...

Q: This was 1976.

SHELTON-COLBY: Seventy-six, and then in '77 Cyrus Vance was named and put a team together. Two friends of mine, with whom I had worked in the Senate, went with Mr. Vance into the State Department, one as his executive assistant, and one as a deputy under secretary for management. And they were looking for...

Q: What were their names?

SHELTON-COLBY: Dan Spiegel was Vance's executive assistant, one of them, anyway. And he had worked for Senator Humphrey on foreign policy, our offices were right next door to each other and we had become friendly. The other was Richard Moose, who became deputy under secretary for management and then, later, assistant secretary for African affairs. They were looking for like-minded Democrats to bring in to senior positions in the State Department. And, frankly, I think they were looking for women and minorities.

Q: Carter had made a...

SHELTON-COLBY: He had that commitment, that's right. And you may also recall that an ambassadorial commission was set up. It was chaired by independents from around the country and from a variety of different backgrounds to look for people from a non-traditional orientation, and that is, people other than big givers, to bring in as ambassadors. Someone called me one day and asked if I had any objection to my name being put forward to be considered for an ambassador. I said no. I did not take it seriously, because I thought I was very young, I was thirty-two years old. I had just turned thirty-two, and I didn't feel that I had a particularly strong background. I had a fairly strong academic

background and six years with Bentsen, a couple of years teaching in Mexico, but there were other people who had a far stronger background.

So, in any event, lo and behold, the Ambassadorial Commission recommended me to the president to be ambassador to El Salvador. I was absolutely staggered. In fact, I had left Bentsen's office not expecting to go into the Executive Branch. I had accepted an offer from the private sector, and I had moved to New York. They tracked me down in South Africa, where I was on vacation before I actually started my new job in New York, to ask me if I would accept the President's offer of the embassy in El Salvador. And I said yes, totally flabbergasted; I really couldn't believe it.

I flew to Rome to fill out the forms for the security check. It was on a train in Italy that I read the news that the foreign minister of El Salvador had been assassinated by leftist guerillas. I knew that this meant trouble for my appointment.

To make a long story short, that was the period when the violence really increased significantly in Salvador. It had always been a violent country, but there had been an up-up-surge in leftist activity. With the kidnapping and assassination of the foreign minister (who was exactly my age, by the way; Borganova was his name), I realized that this would complicate my going out as an ambassador. And it did. I was told that El Salvador had been chosen for me because it was a “small, quiet embassy on which I could cut my teeth.” Of course, it turned out to be not that.

Q: I might add that in an interview I did with Henry Catto, who had been ambassador there before, he said that the highest visitor he had was the lieutenant governor of Mississippi, I think.

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, that shows you just how quiet it was.

In any event, over the course of the next six months, Mr. Vance decided, in conjunction with the White House, that this was not really the place for me to go. Instead they offered

me the job (which I frankly thought would be a more interesting job, anyway for someone of my age and experience) of deputy assistant secretary of state for Latin America, and would I accept it? I said yes, because I felt I still had a lot to learn about how the Executive Branch worked. I could lecture and write books about the Congress, but I needed still to know a lot about the Executive Branch. I felt that that was really a better job for me, because I would have responsibility for sixteen or seventeen countries, and it would give me a chance to learn how the bureaucracy worked in the Executive Branch.

It was a time of real ferment in the hemisphere. President Carter promoted a human rights policy to try to figure out a way of getting the generals back to the barracks. Of course, this was extremely controversial. In my area particularly, the Guatemalans rejected our cutoff of military assistance and said we don't want it anyway. It was a very full platter for someone who was so young.

Q: Well, let's go back to that. Here you are, it's 1977, you're coming on, you're young, you're a woman, you're coming out of Congress. And although you have this background (which, I might add, is probably more pertinent than three-fourths of the people who end up in some of these jobs) coming from the political side, how were you accepted by the Foreign Service and the rest of the bureaucracy?

SHELTON-COLBY: Badly, at the beginning. I think it improved later. But the Foreign Service had indicated that, had I gone to El Salvador, they would have testified against me. I did note with interest that they were not as critical of the men who were brought into the State Department who were about the same age and, if anything, had less of a background than I had. But the ire was directed against me. I am not one of these women who tend to blame my problems on my gender, but I couldn't help but note a differentiation in the way I was treated.

Q: How did this manifest itself?

SHELTON-COLBY: No one was rude to my face. On the contrary, everyone was very polite. But you feel these things. Rumor got back to me; I was well aware of what people were saying, that I was too young and I didn't have enough background, etc., etc., and I was just a political appointee, etc., etc., etc.

I ignored it. I knew that, as I had said to you earlier, a part of my head and my heart was still in the State Department, from when I was a child, when I had wanted to be an ambassador. I suppose I really looked at becoming an ambassador as going the Foreign Service route, and it just didn't quite end up that way. But I was more a part of the Foreign Service, maybe, than some Foreign Service officers were, even though I was an outsider.

I didn't really, thinking back, set out to win them over or to try to prove anything to them. I had a job to do, and I was going to do it.

I had jumped in feet first, because we had all these problems exploding around us in Central America and, increasingly, in the Caribbean. The Caribbean started of looking as though it were going to the left. Plus, we had constant problems with Mexico. I just jumped in feet first, and I think fairly soon they learned that my background was relevant, I did know something about the area, especially Mexico. I had contacts in Mexico that they didn't have, like with the former president, Echeverr#a, and many people in the new administration whom I had met through my previous husband's family and my husband, and through my work with Bentsen.

And, also, I work hard. I was working night and day, seven days a week. I was in before they got in, in the morning, and I was still there when they left at night, and I was there most of every weekend. And I think I proved fairly quickly that I was committed to the same goals as they: protecting U.S. interests. And I probably gave people more of my time than I should have. But, you know, if ARA had a different interest from HA (which was usually the case in those years), I really tried very hard to adjudicate those interests and to give everybody a fair hearing.

Q: HA was...

SHELTON-COLBY: It was human rights. And, of course, the security community felt very uncomfortable with the suspension of military aid to advance the interests of human rights. Those were very tough years, where the bureaucracy was not always accepting of the White House's priority on human rights.

Q: No, the human rights thing, I was in Korea at the time, and we thought, yes, this is nice, but we have forty divisions thirty-five miles north of us. For whatever reason, you tend to focus on the security problem. I want to talk about your relations with Pat Derian and human rights, but, first, what sort of emanations were you getting from our ambassadors and their staffs on human rights, particularly in Central America where this thing was really impacting?

SHELTON-COLBY: Actually, I found that most of the ambassadors were supportive, because, remember, these were Carter appointees, these were people whom the White House and Secretary Vance felt were likely to be supportive of putting a higher priority on human rights. So the ambassadors, as a general rule, at least in my area, tended to be quite supportive of these goals.

Let me come back for just a minute to the Foreign Service generally. I can't help but take advantage of this opportunity to put something down on record. As I was coming in as a DAS, deputy assistant secretary, a male career Foreign Service officer, who has since become a good friend, came up to me and said, “Sally, why do you want to be deputy assistant secretary for Latin America? You know, the Latins won't take you seriously, and you'll just have all sorts of problems operating in Latin America as a woman. And wouldn't you rather be deputy assistant secretary for... well... Well, deputy assistant secretary for... well... Well, for Cultural Affairs?” That was the only way he could conceive of a woman. And I think that was probably a fairly typical mindset.

Let me just say that in almost twenty-five years of working on Latin America, there have only been two occasions on which I felt I was having a problem due to my gender. One was with a government official, and the other was with an academic. So I think that's not a bad record. I probably had more problems with North American men than I had with Latin men. But, in any event, that's a whole other...

Q: No, but I think it's important to get this feeling for mindsets.

SHELTON-COLBY: Let me make the point that I make to my women students and other young women who ask me if I've had problems in this field. Men will have problems being taken seriously if they are not serious about their work. But if you have done your homework, if you have studied the issues, and if you comport yourself as a professional, you're not going to have difficulty. It may take women a little longer to prove themselves than it will take men, but if a man has not done his homework, and a man is not serious in his professional comportment, then he's going to have a problem too. So I would say, Don't let anyone ever try to tell you that there's an issue or a geographic area or a culture that you cannot work in. I work with many Japanese. I have no problems with them. On the contrary. But I do my homework, I am serious about my work, and I comport myself accordingly. I would say that there are more and more women going into Japanese studies and Arab studies and, increasingly now, into Latin American studies. And so I don't think gender should be allowed to keep one from doing what one wants to do.

Q: No, as a boss, I went through this barrier at one point. You didn't send a consular officer down to such and such a thing where, my God, she might be raped or something. But then pretty soon you started thinking, well, if you sent a male down there, he might get hit in the head. You just have to decide who's the best person to do the job. It takes a while, and the Foreign Service has had to work its way through it.

SHELTON-COLBY: It's come a long way, I think.

Q: And the cultural barriers and all this. You came at a time when there was a real clash with HA, which was human rights, under Pat Derian, in which one had the feeling that here were some idealogues who were sitting there putting everything in terms of Mississippi politics and race and everything else of that nature, who were having almost a veto power. I mean, the curses that were going around all over because everything was all of a sudden looked at through this particular prism. And here you had lots of other fish to fry than just human rights. I would imagine Central America was a particular focus; Mexico, probably not as much; the Caribbean, maybe some. How did you deal with the human rights people?

SHELTON-COLBY: I have often said that during those years I spent more time negotiating with people inside my own government than I did negotiating with people in other governments.

Let me just say that I bounce a little bit at the word “idealogue,” because idealogue tends to have very negative connotations: an inability to compromise.

Q: Well, I'm saying that was the impression. That's why I used the term specifically.

SHELTON-COLBY: Actually, I dealt more with Mark Schneider than I did with Pat (Mark was the deputy assistant secretary for human rights, and someone who had worked for many years for Senator Kennedy). I knew him from my Senate days, and he had a very strong background in Latin America, so I tended to work with him more. But these were people with very strong points of view; very committed to an improvement in human rights.

We all are committed to an improvement in human rights, the question is: What strategy do you employ for achieving those objectives?

I was in a particularly difficult position. I was a political appointee and therefore needed to defend the White House's priority on human rights. At the same time, I believed there were other U.S. interests that had to be protected. I always felt that human rights should

have a higher priority than it had in the past, but it was not necessarily the priority in any given country. So, of course, where you put human rights might shift from day to day, depending on what other issues were on the agenda. There was substantial turmoil within the Department in those years One example of the conflict that occurred almost daily was the case of someone whom I have great respect for and I consider myself a good friend of, Wade Matthews, my director of Central American affairs. Wade is very conservative, and Wade tended to articulate very well the point of view that human rights intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, and we should not be meddling. I usually did not agree with him. I was trying to figure out how to convince the human rights people that there were other legitimate issues, national interests, in a given country, and yet I was trying to bring people who felt uneasy about human rights, around to accept the idea of the importance of human rights. I was constantly negotiating between these two groups to get a policy that we could all agree upon. It was very tough.

Q: Let's go into some detail.

SHELTON-COLBY: Of course, Nicaragua and Salvador, and Guatemala to some extent, were two of the really big issues.

Let me mention one interesting illustration that I'd forgotten about until somebody doing a book called me about the other day. Rarely did a week go by that we were not arguing about what tools to use, of the few that we had, to demonstrate our hope that Nicaragua and Salvador would liberalize politically.

Q: At this point, Nicaragua was still under Somoza.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, Nicaragua was still under Somoza, and El Salvador was still under the control of the generals.

The tools that we had to encourage change were very limited. They were (1) military assistance, (2) bilateral economic assistance, and (3) U.S. votes in the international

financial institutions (IFIs): the World Bank, the IMF, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Lastly, there were statements that could be made by either the State Department or the White House. So those were the four categories, and that was not a whole lot. Our aid programs in these areas were fairly small. So we were constantly debating internally as to what was the proper mix of policy tools to use in a given situation. And, again, it was primarily Nicaragua and Salvador.

At one point, you may recall that in those years, '77 specifically, a committee was formed, and it was popularly known as the Christopher Committee. It was composed of representatives from throughout the U.S. government that had an interest in human rights policy.

Q: The deputy secretary was Warren Christopher.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, it was Warren Christopher, exactly. Representatives came from all of the other institutions involved in foreign policy. We would sit there and try to construct a policy. Obviously, the policy was driven by a particular vote that would be coming up in the next few days in the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, or driven by some other event. These meetings were very contentious, with the Bureau of Human Rights always arguing for the toughest policy position, and the Desk usually wanting the weakest policy position. I frankly don't remember what the position was of our executive directors in the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

In fact, you know, they, Stu, if I may call you Stu...

Q: Please, please.

SHELTON-COLBY: ...might be very interesting people to bring in. They technically did not have the rank of ambassador, but, for example, Ralph Dunegan was our executive director in the Inter-American Development Bank, and that was a key channel in those years for influencing human rights. In some countries, like Chile, we didn't have bilateral aid, we

only had votes in the international financial institutions. So that would be a very interesting group of people to bring in to this project.

Q: Yes, it would be, it would be. I'll talk to you more about that.

SHELTON-COLBY: Okay.

In any event, at one point, I was with Secretary Vance in Mexico on a bilateral visit, and I got a call from Wade Matthews, who was the office director for CEN, Central American Affairs. Wade said they'd just had a meeting of the Christopher Committee, and there had been a difference of view, of analysis, as to the situation in El Salvador. I suspect that the Bureau of Human Rights was saying, “It's really bad and getting worse,” and that ARA was saying, “Its human rights are improving.” So there was a difference of view on the facts. So it had been decided to send Mark Schneider, who was the deputy assistant secretary in human rights, down to take a look at the human rights situation in El Salvador. And this was a measure of the distrust that ARA had for HA, that ARA would agree to it only if I would go with Mark. So I did not come back from Mexico to Washington, I went down to Salvador. I met Mark there, and together we reviewed the human rights situation and came up with a joint report.

This was, again, I think, an interesting illustration of the distrust that existed between ARA and HA, not just on policy, but on the assessment of the human rights situation. You couldn't even get consensus on what the facts were, much less on policy. That characterized the State Department during the whole time I was there.

Q: While you were there, what sort of emanations were you getting from the National Security Council representative, the White House, Brzezinski and all, about that area? Obviously, there was this dispute, really, between the human rights policy and the other foreign affairs policies that we had in every country and in your particular bailiwick.

SHELTON-COLBY: As I recall, Bob Pastor, who was the Latin America person on the NSC, and who has a memory like an elephant. Although he did not have the rank of ambassador, he also might be someone interesting...

Q: By the way, rank of ambassador is not...

SHELTON-COLBY: Isn't it? Oh, I see, okay. Well, I think Bob would be a wonderful person to get.

Q: Bob...?

SHELTON-COLBY: Robert Pastor. He has written a number of books about U.S. policy since he left the Administration. He's with President Carter at the Carter Center at Emory University. He's in town a lot, and I'm sure he'd be delighted to do it. He was an extremely active NSC staffer. He was basically pushing for a prioritization on human rights, and frequently tangled with the State Department bureaucracy. From time to time something would come out of the White House that would surprise us and totally baffle us.

For example, at one point, President Carter decided to write a letter to President Somoza of Nicaragua applauding him for some things that he had done. He had lifted the state of siege, and he had done a few other things. Frankly, I don't recall what the specifics were, at the moment. But President Carter thought that he should be encouraged. So Carter wrote a letter to Somoza, which went through diplomatic channels down to Somoza. Frankly, I was very unhappy with the letter, because I feared that it might leak. You just can't keep anything like that quiet. Before it went out, I tried to convince the White House it was a bad idea. But the president took the initiative, and the president was elected and I wasn't, so the president had the right to insist that it go out.

In any event, whether it was the President's idea or Bob's idea, to this day I don't know. I think Bob insists that it was the President's idea. And Carter was very active. I mean, it may indeed have been his idea.

But some months later, as I recall, I don't remember the time frame, it did leak. To say the least it was not helpful, because we were trying to convince the democratic opposition in Nicaragua that we were really serious about pressuring Somoza. The latter made us look as though we were talking out of both sides of our mouth. Even though I think that the reality was that Somoza had done some things for which he should have been encouraged, he might have been encouraged more quietly than through a letter. For example, by instructing our ambassador down there to express President Carter's pleasure at his having lifted the state of siege. Whatever, as opposed to putting it down on paper. But, in any event, it leaked, and it was embarrassing.

So from time to time the White House would do something like that. It was an initiative which would have been applauded by CEN, but not by the human rights community within the structure.

Again, I don't know how much more detail you want me to go into.

Q: How about, say, with the Senate? How about Senator Kennedy's office or something like that?

SHELTON-COLBY: The Congress is really terribly, terribly important. There's a tendency on the part of people who have not been inside the government not to fully understand that you've got limited political capital in the Executive Branch to invest in getting what you want from the Congress.

You will recall that one of the first accomplishments of the Carter Administration was the Panama Canal Treaty. I think even today some of the people who were opposed to it acknowledge that it was the right thing to do. Not only did the treaty need to be ratified,

but also we had to get implementing legislation through both chambers of Congress. That was a hellacious process to go through. And it was especially hellacious because one big chunk of the implementing legislation had to go through what was at the time the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries. That committee was chaired by Congressman Jack Murphy from New York, and he had been either a roommate or a bosom buddy of President Somoza at West Point. So I would be called to task by Congressman Murphy whenever I testified about the situation in Nicaragua. Specifically, I remember once (I mention this specific in an effort to illustrate a broader pattern), Congressman Donald Fraser from Minneapolis, one of the world's most wonderful and decent human beings, was chairman of the committee on human rights, and he got me to come up once and testify on Nicaragua. I was critical...I thought I was being objectively critical, but I was critical of Somoza's lack of human rights record in Nicaragua.

Q: It was pretty hard not to be.

SHELTON-COLBY: The next day, or within hours, I don't remember, I think it was the next day, Murphy called me up on the carpet. He called me to come up to his office, and read me the riot act for beating up on his friend Tachito Somoza. Murphy threatened to hold up the implementing legislation for the Panama Canal Treaty through. It was very clear—it could not have been made clearer—that if we wanted the implementing legislation on the Panama Canal Treaty, we had to lay off Somoza. So what do you do? You have to establish priorities.

Secondly, Congressman Charles Wilson from Texas (my home state), who is still in Congress today, was chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. That was the subcommittee that controlled the State Department's budget and the AID budget. Charlie was very friendly with Somoza, and Charlie would call me and read me the riot act as well. One day he called me and threatened me. He said, “You tell your friends that if State and AID want a budget, they had better stop beating up on Somoza.”

Q: So, but, okay, this goes to you. How do you get this out?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, I immediately wrote a memo, which I then hand delivered to the assistant secretary.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary?

SHELTON-COLBY: First it was Terry Todman, and then it was Pete Vaky, then Bill Bowdler after I went out as ambassador. But I wrote a memo, then, which was distributed to all of the relevant people, and I simply reported on the conversations with Congressmen Murphy and Wilson. It was then disseminated through the system to all the people who needed to know that they were threatening that there might have to be a tradeoff between our desire to (a) get our budget approved, and (b) get the implementing legislation for the Panama Canal Treaty approved versus our ability to continue to pressure Somoza to open up...

Q: Well, I would think this would be at the point where decisions would be made basically at the White House of how to play this.

SHELTON-COLBY: They were made at a higher level than where I was, certainly. I don't know that they were necessarily made in the White House. Again, this is something that it would be very good to ask Bob Pastor. And I don't know if Pete Vaky might remember this also. Or Terry Todman; I don't know if you've interviewed Terry for this. But this material is critical to the shaping of our policy towards Somoza in those years, and the Sandinista experience. I was not involved, at the level of DAS, in the taking of those kinds of decisions, what the relative priorities should be, because I did not have any responsibility for Panama. That was handled at a much higher level.

Q: In fact, Gale McGee was sort of the...

SHELTON-COLBY: He was ambassador to the Organization of American States at the time.

Q: Used sort of as the point man for this.

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes. But where, precisely, in the power structure inside the U.S. government the trade-offs were made, I don't know.

Now let me say, Stu, that I never particularly felt the effects of whatever the decision was. I never felt that we were really being pressured from upstairs to back off from pressuring Somoza.

Now events were moving extremely fast in Nicaragua, extremely fast, maybe faster than a decision upstairs could keep up with events on the ground. Mr. Chamorro was assassinated in January of '78. The Nicaraguan Democrats were beginning to throw their lot in with the militant Sandinistas. The Sandinistas were winning battles in Nicaragua. And by late fall of '79, Somoza was out and then the Sandinistas were in.

Q: When did you leave the deputy assistant secretary job?

SHELTON-COLBY: In October, I believe it was, of '78 I went up to USUN basically to wait. By this time, I had been offered the job of ambassador in the Eastern Caribbean. Oh, I knew it was coming; I hadn't officially been offered it, but I knew it was coming. And I went up to USUN, where we always have a Latin America specialist. We have an officer from each geographic bureau while the UN General Assembly is operating.

Q: I want to come back; I just wanted to...

SHELTON-COLBY: So I spent October, November, and December of '78 at the UN.

Q: Well, back to the time when Somoza was going through his last year or so, while you were there, what were you hearing, and what was the analysis about the Sandinistas?

SHELTON-COLBY: We had information that there were some real hardliners, but we didn't know very much about them. They were still very much a group about which there was very little hard information. Actually, I was the person who received, in September of '77, the manifesto from the Group of Twelve. That was the first organized opposition group to Somoza, which, in effect, presaged the fall of Somoza. In fact, Miguel Descoto, who went on to become the Sandinista foreign minister, came into my office on a Saturday to give it to me. It was a declaration of their intent to bring democracy to Nicaragua, and it was signed by a number of non-Sandinistas. We had information that some of them were very hardline and very anti-American, but others we believed to be fairly reasonable centrist people. We certainly did not have strong evidence that they would turn out to be quite as difficult as they were.

Q: Well, I was just wondering, though, part of the ethos of the time was that, when you look at it, the tough guys drive out the good guys. And with the Cuban example, well, we really didn't know much about Castro, and people were saying, Well, maybe he's not really a Communist, and all this sort of thing. I mean, how was that thinking...?

SHELTON-COLBY: I don't think the Cuba example was particularly a factor here. Certainly I do not recollect that example being very live or very much discussed in all the meetings that we had during this period. Obviously there were many different points of view on this, but I do not believe there was any dominant sense that we were going to run the risk of losing Nicaragua because the hardliners would push the softliners out. If there was any dominant sense at all, I would have to say it was the contrary: there was a feeling that we could work with the moderates in this group and strengthen the moderates. I think that was sort of the dominant ethos at the time. There were some strong moderates: Alfonso Robelo, the Chamorros, and others. These were people we thought we could do business

with (as Mrs. Thatcher said of Mr. Gorbachev). And if we could develop a strategy for strengthening these elements, then we could keep the harder-line elements at bay.

Q: So, while you were there, this was sort of: Encourage Somoza to be more moderate and not to slam the door on these others, and hope that the opposition would not turn out to be a Castro.

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, of course, it was constantly evolving. Initially the feeling was (this was primarily the case under Terry Todman): Let's work with Somoza and get him to open up. That is a feasible strategy; it is possible for Somoza to liberalize Nicaragua politically.

Increasingly, we moved away from that construct to accepting...or at least some of us did, and I think our ambassador on the ground, Ambassador Solaun,...and he would be very interesting for you to interview. I don't know where he is now, probably back at the University of either Illinois or Indiana, where he came from. Several of us came to accept the idea that we could not pressure Somoza to open up. He was an obstacle in the path to political liberalization in Nicaragua. He would go so far and no farther.

And then that became an issue even within ARA, between those who felt that Somoza could be worked with and those of us who felt that he couldn't be worked with, we had to somehow get rid of him.

This was further complicated by the mindset of the people who came out of the Vietnam era, like Tony Lake and others. Tony was head of the policy planning staff.

I'll never forget a meeting in Christopher's office, at one point. There was a tremendous amount of tension and stress in all this. The Sandinistas were advancing. I said, “We have got to push Somoza out; we've got to get Somoza out of there.” This was summer, I think it was late summer of '78, if I recall correctly.

Tony got very upset with me, and he raised his voice, and he said, “We cannot be responsible for bringing down another government.” It was the Vietnam syndrome.

Q: Sure.

SHELTON-COLBY: I raised my voice back and said, “Not even when the results are going to be that we're going to replace one authoritarian government with another authoritarian government?” Because I think I had begun to worry at the time about the Cuba model. I was worrying about the hardliners taking over and pushing out the moderates among the Sandinistas.

And Tony said, “No, not even under those circumstances.”

Tony came to interview me three or four years ago for a book that he subsequently published on Nicaragua, and he admitted: “You were right.”

There were those internal dynamics. I think it's really important to put on the record these complexities of attitude. And I think, if you interviewed Bob Pastor, you would find that that was the problem within the White House as well. There was an unwillingness to use U.S. power to change a government, even to forestall a right-wing authoritarian government being replaced by a left-wing authoritarian government; people didn't feel comfortable with using U.S. power to those ends. I would prefer not to have to use U.S. power to those ends, but sometimes you have to.

Q: Well, what about El Salvador? What was the concern at that time with El Salvador?

SHELTON-COLBY: El Salvador was a different situation. There was no broad movement in Salvador, the way there was in Nicaragua, of moderates joining forces with the guerilla left, in those years. A few moderates did subsequently join the guerillas but not to the extent as in Nicaragua.

In Salvador the issue for us always was how do you deal with the guerilla threat and the right-wing killings as well? So it was an interesting crucible within which the issues of trying to keep the extreme left contained, and yet keep the extreme right from killing everybody in the process... And this was not the only country in the world where we've had to face that problem. But that was really the issue then, in those years.

But, frankly, Nicaragua really dominated our priorities while I was deputy assistant secretary.

Q: Sally, we were talking about your, particularly Central American, disputes there, while you were the deputy assistant secretary in American Republics Affairs. I wonder if we could talk now about sort of the area of your particular expertise and one that's of major importance to the United States, always has been but never seems to get the attention, that is, our relations with Mexico. How did you see it at the time, and what were the problems, and how did we deal with them?

SHELTON-COLBY: The thing that struck me the most about that part of the job was the multiplicity of actors involved in the process of shaping U.S. policy towards Mexico. I frequently felt as though I had very limited or sometimes virtually no control over U.S. policy towards the region because of the other interests: drugs, pollution was beginning to be an issue at that time, crime. I can go on and on.

Q: Immigration.

SHELTON-COLBY: Immigration, of course, always. And, you know, stoppages along the border, backups along the border that affected both the movement of people as well as of goods. Then, of course, there was, on the international side, the constant difficulties we had with the Mexican government that consistently took a position quite different from that of the United States in international organizations and was trying to assert its voice as a spokesman for the non-aligned. Therefore, there were inevitably tensions on issues

beyond issues in the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship. It was the one country in the region, other than Nicaragua, that really was able to capture high-level attention, including the vice president and the president, as well as the secretary of state, of course.

Q: Well, let's get the detail; the detail is important. And we're particularly looking at it from your perspective, your vantage point. Maybe talk about some of, particularly, the problems that came up. Why don't we first talk about the foreign relations aspect in the United Nations and all. Hadn't we by this point reached the point of saying, "Look, this is one area where the Mexican government can stick it to the gringo and vote against us. Just leave it at that. Say that the Mexicans will always be the Mexicans, and forget it, don't waste our ammunition?" Or did we feel that way?

SHELTON-COLBY: I think we very much felt that way. But the Carter Administration took office with a priority to try to work on the U.S.-Mexico relationship and try to get over the tensions that had historically pervaded the relationship. In fact, the Carter Administration even named an ambassador-at-large (he had the rank of ambassador) former Congressman Bob Krueger from Texas, to be the point person on Mexico for the Administration.

Q: By the way, when you say the Carter Administration did this, renowned in the Foreign Service as one of the big disasters of ambassadorial appointments was the Carter appointment of Ambassador Lucey to Mexico. He was a defeated candidate from Minnesota or someplace like that, so I mean...

SHELTON-COLBY: Wisconsin.

Q: Not that personally there was any problem, but he just didn't bring anything to that post.

SHELTON-COLBY: I don't think I'll comment on individual Carmelite ambassadorial appointments.

Q: But it doesn't show a seriousness there. I mean, why did you have a special ambassador?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, that was the president's decision; I was not involved in taking it, and I wouldn't presume to try to look into the president's mind and figure out why he appointed whom he did. As I say, I think I'll decline to comment on ambassadorial appointments.

Q: Okay. Well, anyway. But you say there was this...

SHELTON-COLBY: There was a priority to work on the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Carter had something of a special interest in Latin America, and Mexico is obviously by far the most important country in Latin America for us. Originally, the idea was to put that job in the White House in order to push the bureaucracy more easily. But Secretary Vance opposed putting it in the White House. So the job was put in the State Department, which meant that Krueger did not have the authority to crack bureaucratic heads together and get issues resolved. He should have been above the bureaucracy in the White House.

I think the idea of the creation of that post, of putting it where it was, was not successful in really trying to facilitate the decision-making process in the U.S. to be more responsive to some of the concerns that the Mexicans had which we perceived as legitimate.

But, be that as it may, we really did not succeed in significantly improving the relationship with the Mexicans. I think there were two reasons for that.

Number one, I think it was the wrong Mexican Administration. I think that the policy objective was impossible to have achieved because of the nature of the Mexican Administration.

Q: Which president and Administration was that?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was President Lopez Portillo. Echeverr#a was before. Echeverr#a was from '70 to '76, and then came Lopez Portillo. Like Echeverr#a, Lopez Portillo was committed to a policy of standing up to the United States on every possible issue. It proved to be impossible to develop a relationship of better understanding between the two governments, because I don't think Lopez Portillo wanted a smoother, less tense relationship. I think both his own individual mindset as well as the politics in Mexico at that time argued for a position of, frankly, relative hostility towards the United States.

Q: Also, wasn't there a feeling at that time, because of the oil business, that Mexico could really do it on its own? Or did that come later on?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was about '77 when major oil finds began to be discovered, and it was really later, in '78, '79, and '80, that the big spending actually began. The fields had been discovered in the mid-'70s but were kept quiet. It was in '77 when the Mexicans made a decision to start spending and borrowing money.

So that was part of it, but even if oil had not been found let's remember that this antagonistic attitude towards the United States predated Lopez Portillo. In that sense, he was very much the successor to Echeverr#a, with whom we had a perfectly terrible bilateral relationship. Echeverr#a, I like and I see from time to time, because I think it's important to talk to all possible elements in the political spectrum. I need to remind myself every now and again that there are people in Mexico still who think like Echeverr#a, even though he is very much in the minority now. He's a very decent person on an individual basis, but not friendly to the United States. Nothing we can do is ever the right thing, from his perspective.

So I think, frankly, we made a mistake in even making any kind of an effort, because I think there was not a predisposition in the political structure in Mexico to accept some more positive efforts from the United States. As you say, Mexico was really beginning to feel its oats in terms of 'We've got money, and, you know, we've made it.'

Secondly, some mistakes were made by individuals with regard to Mexico which really made the policy objective of improving the relationship that much more unlikely.

Q: Could you go into...

SHELTON-COLBY: For example, the public mistake that Carter made when he went to Mexico and began talking about his having Montezuma's Revenge. That was unbearably tacky, if not vulgar, to even talk about having diarrhea. But then in the country where Montezuma came from, to talk about it was an unbelievable diplomatic gaffe. That was one example.I think some of the people who had direct dealings with the Mexicans...not all of them, because some got along quite well with the Mexicans, but others didn't. Some of the people involved didn't know Mexico, didn't speak Spanish, did not understand the culture and the mindset. And some of these people did not have as much clout in the White House as they said.

Q: Well, the ambassador wasn't part of the power structure.

SHELTON-COLBY: The ambassador's role in Mexico is critical. No matter what the State Department's telling you to do, if an ambassador has clout in the White House, he or she can circumvent the bureaucracy and go straight to the president, the vice president, or the national security advisor and say, “We really ought to be doing X,” when the bureaucracy is dragging its feet or saying do Y or Z, or whatever. I certainly don't argue that every ambassador everywhere in the world needs to have active clout in the White House, but in the case of Mexico and Canada, and a handful of other countries as well, I think it's really very important to have the ear of the President.

Q: Because there are so many other factors going on. The State Department in many ways plays not a major...

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, it plays a fairly minimal role. I think there are two reasons why I make this argument.

Number one is because Mexico, obviously, is a neighbor, and we have all kinds of very important interests in a cooperative relationship with Mexico.

Secondly, the point I was making when I first began this part of the discussion, there are so many disparate interests, and therefore bureaucratic actors, and the State Departments's piece of the action is relatively modest. As other actors, in no particular order of priority, you've got the Departments of Defense, Treasury, Justice, Commerce, Agriculture, Interior and the Special Trade Representatives.

Q: Justice.

SHELTON-COLBY: I cannot name a part of the U.S. government that does not have some role with regard to Mexico.

Q: Just balancing it off, when you think of the Department of Justice, immigration is far more important than Mexico's UN votes to the State Department.

SHELTON-COLBY: I think so.

Q: And there are so many other areas.

SHELTON-COLBY: Of course, not to mention that you've got the international financial institutions, although they were less of an actor then than they are today. I remember once, to my great surprise, I even found that what was then HEW, the old Health, Education, and Welfare, now HHS, had some interest in some issue, though I forget now what it was.

Therefore, when you have a plethora of interests, and as a consequence, a plethora of bureaucratic actors, sometimes you have serious conflict within the U.S. bureaucracy.

Therefore, it really is important to have an ambassador who can go over the heads of the bureaucracy to the White House and argue his view—rightly or wrongly—of the U.S. national interest. Particularly if you've got a situation where the secretary of state, the deputy secretary of state, and maybe even the under secretary for political affairs are all distracted on other issues and you can't get the bureaucracy to resolve an issue, then if you can go to the White House, you can get some movement.

So that's why I argue that it's really a mistake to send someone to Mexico who does not have influence in the White House.

Q: I might add, just for the record, and this is strictly my impression, I've never served there, that Governor Lucey arrived and did not have much clout in the White House, but he also sort of surrounded himself with his own little palace guard. He sort of separated himself from the normal embassy structure, which helped compound part of the problem. But maybe it was insoluble.

SHELTON-COLBY: However, a man named James Baker has done that, and he's been a pretty successful secretary of state.

Q: So far. But that's secretary of state, and he has access to the White House. Well, on Mexico, what problems engaged you the most?

SHELTON-COLBY: Immigration, drugs, environmental issues, crime along the border. Occasionally, abuse of Mexicans working in the United States, and other human rights abuses. Then, of course, there were always the votes at the UN. And then, of course, there was always a constant interchange of people: Vance, Mondale, and Carter visited, etc. And therefore there were all the unending preparations for these trips.

At one point, before he traveled to Mexico, Mondale asked me to come over to the White House, because I had known him from Senate days when I worked for Bentsen. He

pointed to the briefing book from the State Department, which was about eight inches thick.

Q: Eight inches thick; it looks like the unabridged dictionary.

SHELTON-COLBY: He said, “Sally, can you tell me what's in there?” It was too much for him to read. Now I had been involved in putting it together and I think I was probably the person responsible for it. I have worked on the preparation of any number of other briefing books, and I don't like the process of providing briefing books. I don't think it's efficient; I don't think it works. I think they are too long. It would have taken the vice president of the United States hours to have gone through that briefing book. Also, I think that sometimes the issues are written in a way that is hard for the consumer of the product to understand what the issue is all about.

Q: This isn't a minor...I might say...

SHELTON-COLBY: It's a problem of getting clearance through the bureaucracy.

Q: This is not a minor problem.

SHELTON-COLBY: It's not a minor problem.

Q: Because when the vice president or president goes down, the briefing book is often supposed to be the person proclaiming the policy. And this is a theme that comes up again and again.

SHELTON-COLBY: But you've heard it before?

Q: For the people who come from outside sort of the bureaucracy, they look at these things. Is there any way of solving this? I mean, were you able to go through and say, okay, look, this isn't going to be read?

SHELTON-COLBY: I didn't even open the briefing book. I just briefed him orally. Maybe he read it as well, I don't know. But if I were the vice president, I probably would not have had the time to tackle a six- to eight-inch-high briefing book, particularly if someone who is reasonably knowledgeable about Mexico could orally brief me and outline what the issues were, in a fair and objective and honest way. I tried very hard to do this, though I might have put somewhat of an ARA slant on the issues. I always felt it was very important, in briefing senior official, either in the White House or the State Department to make it very clear that there were other U.S. government interests beyond ARA's. Some of my colleagues, though, have had a very different philosophy; they've only pushed the position of their particular bureau. I have never felt that was really fair. I think it's really important for senior officers to know that there are other people in the U.S. government who think differently about a given issue, as opposed to pushing only my bureau's point of view. I'll certainly argue my bureau's point of view, though I'll certainly argue my bureau's point of view.

Economic issues were not so important at the time. That is obviously what dominates the relationship now, but trade and debt issues were nonexistent or limited, so the non-economic issues were paramount.

Q: Simpson-Mazzoli was an immigration reform bill, which gave special assistance to the Mexican problem.

SHELTON-COLBY: What it does is impose penalties on employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens. But it has not had any appreciable effect; the level of illegal migration is as high today as it was before Simpson-Mazzoli was passed. So you can argue as to whether we benefit. I happen to think we benefit as a country from migration.

Q: All right, let's look at this just for a minute.

SHELTON-COLBY: And, of course, fisheries issues always, too.

Q: Well, this immigration at that time, what was the State Department's attitude? Obviously, this thing was always annoying the Mexicans. Other than mobilizing our Army and putting across the border, there wasn't an awful lot we could do about it.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's exactly right.

Q: But you have the Justice Department having to deal with this thing through the Immigration Service, other people who were talking about let's get tough and all this.

SHELTON-COLBY: People in the Congress especially.

Q: People in the Congress. When you were there, what was the State Department line on this?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was a moveable feast; it changed frequently. I would synthesize a very complex situation, to the best of my recollection, by saying that ARA realized that there were growing pressures from both the Executive and the Congress to pass legislation which would attempt to control illegal immigration. The Mexicans were dead set against our doing that. We were trying to figure out a way of being responsive to the pressures from within our own government, yet somehow keeping it as palatable as possible for the Mexicans. In other words, we were going to do something, the Mexicans were not going to like it, so how to do something which would annoy the Mexicans as little as possible. That was basically it; it was a damage control operation.

Now we also had difficulty understanding the Mexican position. Ambassador Lucey, myself, and others, asked Mexican government officials, “What is your position on migration?” We never got a clear, official position. In private conversations, they would say, “We really don't want you to do anything. We need to continue to let our people move across the border.” But in terms of an official position, they never had one.

Q: Well, from a practical point of view, what could you say—Yes, we want to keep people from leaving our country?

SHELTON-COLBY: I recognize their dilemma. There was little that they could say. But yet, as a U.S. government official, it was galling to try to write a memo or attend a meeting on this issue inside the U.S. government and not be able to articulate the official Mexican position. And when we would try to say to the Mexicans, “All right, you're worried about our passing Simpson-Mazzoli. What would you like? In a perfect world, what would your objective be on immigration?” They wouldn't say anything, or it would be so vague and garbled we wouldn't understand their objectives.

Mexicans in that era were very difficult to deal with; they were very prickly. Whatever we wanted, they were likely to say no. It was a contentious relationship. Not in a military context, obviously, but just in terms of being able to protect whatever U.S. interest we felt needed to be protected, or in terms of achieving whatever policy objective was at issue.

Happily, Mexico is very different today. You can do business with Mexico (as Prime Minister Thatcher said about Gorbachev). It is very much changed. It is a country that is really quite cooperative with us on a whole range of issues, from extradition to economic issues.

Q: Well, now, let's look at the other area you were dealing with, the Caribbean. While you were deputy assistant secretary and you had responsibility, what were your major preoccupations in the Caribbean?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was the perception of growing instability in the Caribbean.

One was the withdrawal of the British from the Eastern Caribbean, dropping independence on some of the tiny islands. The small islands were not super-enthusiastic about having independence, but the British simply wanted to withdraw. We began to realize that this could potentially be a real problem for us. This was pre-Grenada. But then the Grenada

Revolution in '79 confirmed our sense that we could be in for some real problems in the region.

The other part of it was Michael Manley in Jamaica, who was uncomfortably close to the Cubans, and particularly to certain parts of the Cuban government which we felt were especially inimical to U.S. interests. In '77 we had opened Interest Sections in each other's capitals; that is, we and the Cubans. So there was a lessening of tensions to some extent by that action. But, nevertheless, we felt Manley was really too close to the Cubans. The Jamaican economy was deteriorating, in large part as a result of his statist-oriented economic policies.

When the Carter Administration came in, there was a feeling that we should take a special look at the Caribbean. After all, there had been the Dominican Republic in '65; continuing poverty; Manley was cozying up to the Cubans, and, of course, Jamaica is the biggest island in the Caribbean; the British were pulling out. We began to get worried. So Ambassador Andrew Young was asked to make a trip through the Caribbean early in the Carter Administration.

Q: He was an ambassador to the United Nations.

SHELTON-COLBY: He was ambassador to the United Nations, and several of us went with him on this trip. Subsequently, Philip Habib, former under secretary of state for political affairs and then ambassador-at-large (he may have had that designation in the Caribbean, I just don't remember, but he subsequently had it in the Middle East), an absolutely wonderful man, made a trip through the area. Some fairly important policy changes flowed out of those two trips; to wit: almost a quadrupling of U.S. economic assistance to the region.

In addition, I helped to obtain security assistance for the fledgling Eastern Caribbean Coast Guard.

Q: This is when you were ambassador.

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes. None of them had an army, they only had police forces, and under U.S. law at the time, no aid could go to police forces. So we finally convinced the lawyers, after a very long time, to reinterpret the law so as to allow us to provide funding to those countries that only have police forces, where there's not a tradition of military involvement. There was also a lot of high-level travel back and forth between the U.S. and the Caribbean. So that was, in brief, the situation at the time. And then, of course, Grenada later became a wholly separate set of involvements.

Q: Well, we'll talk about that later, but let's talk about, particularly, Castro at this time. He fell under your bailiwick, didn't he?

SHELTON-COLBY: Actually, I did not have Cuba. It was handled separately by another Desk.

Q: Well, then let's talk about Manley. How did we view him at that time?

SHELTON-COLBY: With great suspicion. It was a fairly tense relationship. He would attack us from time to time (Mexican-like in that respect). I think Michael's head and heart at that time were still very much out in left field. He was enamored of the Cubans, who had, of course, stood up to the United States. He was playing a typical role of a Third-World leader. He bashed us from time to time. He was ruining the economy by excessive spending and nationalizing certain parts of the Jamaican economy. He had picked a fight with the foreign bauxite industry, and, as a result, capital was leaving the country and new capital was not coming in. He had, as I said, a very close relationship with the Cubans, far too close for our taste. We never really feared that democracy had any risk of being subverted, but we simply were concerned about a political leadership very close to our shores being, frankly, very uncooperative with us, and a little too cooperative with the other side.

Q: Well, did we have any weapons? Did you sit there, or were we just basically observing and saying, well, he's screwing the thing up, but...

SHELTON-COLBY: Our ambassador would make demarches. We also had control over bilateral economic assistance. I don't remember at the time if we had DA as well as ESF, but we also had small amounts of FMS and IMET that we were providing, and then, of course, loans for Jamaica in the international financial institutions.

Now one thing I did forget to mention, and it's fairly important, is that we undertook a review (it was actually headed by John Bushnell and myself) to look at basically where the Caribbean was going and what it needed. (This was very early on in the Carter Administration.) We were looking at the economic side, and we concluded that what was really required was a significant infusion of funds, particularly with the British pulling out of the Eastern Caribbean. We prioritized development of alternative energy sources (this was right after the Arab oil embargo). The Arabs increased the price of oil, and oil prices shot way up, which really badly hurt the islands, with the exception of Trinidad. All the others are oil-importing islands and were devastated by the increase in the price of oil. So we felt that the aid that had gone into the Caribbean was so small in previous years that it really had to be increased, quite frankly, to try to buy some political stability. The British were still putting in some aid, as well as the French. Also, there were other donors here and there who were putting in bits and pieces, like the European Community.

To make a long story short, we recommended the creation of an international group for the Caribbean, and it subsequently became known by the unwieldy name of the Caribbean Group for Cooperation and Economic Development (CGCED). It was housed in the World Bank, but it included the IMF, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Caribbean Development Bank. It subsequently opened an office in Antigua to have a regional presence for accelerating the disbursal of funds. I think it's been fairly successful. It is still in existence, fourteen years later, not only in monitoring what all the donors are doing and coordinating the flow of funds into the region, but also in terms

of getting additional funding into the region and providing technical assistance to these islands. Sometimes, the islands couldn't draw down the money that was there, because they didn't have the technical resources to do the feasibility studies to use the funding that was available. This is an unheralded program, but it's really done a pretty good job, I think, of getting additional aid and coordinating the aid going into the region. So that was another thing we were very much involved in.

But returning to Manley, we had, obviously, political pressure and control over some economic and military aid funds, but those were relatively weak tools. This was a problem that we had throughout the region, even in Central America, in those years, because we didn't have very much in the way of bilateral aid; most of the aid was multilateral. In more recent years, we have developed bilateral aid programs in addition to the multilateral. In fact, this actually was an argument that was subsequently made for going bilateral.

When I went down as ambassador, I found that in the ten islands for which I was responsible for U.S. policy, we had no bilateral aid programs. If you want to move closer to a country, send a signal that you like what they are doing, or move farther away from a country, like Grenada, we had almost no tools for doing so, short of the hortatory. So I began to argue for bilateral assistance, partly for that reason, to give me more tools to work with, but also partly because the IFIs were extremely slow to develop projects and then disburse. I felt we had to develop projects and disburse more rapidly.

Q: Well, now, sort of looking over this whole thing, I want to put a question to you, because it often comes up. The Caribbean Basin and Mexico and Central America, this is our backyard and this is where the American fruit company and the bauxite people and all really have a lot of clout. And if you're approaching this sort of from a Marxist point of view, or quasi-Marxist, this is where American imperialism is at its height. How much did you, as a deputy assistant secretary dealing with this, feel the pressure and concerns of American business, and how did that affect you?

SHELTON-COLBY: I've been asked this before, and people are always surprised at my response. I felt the pressure of U.S. business almost not at all.

Q: I'm not surprised, because this comes through again and again.

SHELTON-COLBY: Is that right?

Q: Oh, yes, absolutely. But could you explain how this came...?

SHELTON-COLBY: Sure. I must say, when I went into the State Department, I expected business to play a very important role in shaping U.S. policy, particularly in Central America, and the Caribbean to some extent. To my great surprise, I almost never heard from business groups. Business was helpful in supporting our efforts to lobby on behalf of the Panama Canal Treaty, so that was a positive role. Business basically was supportive of our overall approach in the Caribbean and Central America to start pumping more economic assistance in, to deal with the beginnings of our perception of political instability. But, by and large, I almost never heard from industry, not even in the case of Mexico. Obviously, there is major U.S. investment in Mexico, and they were living under rules that they didn't really like, rules that limited foreign equity to forty-nine percent of a given investment. But business knew that there was little that we could do, and the chances of the Mexicans changing the law, which had just been approved in '73, were extremely remote, so business was really not especially active.

The one policy issue on which I did hear from business, though internally, was on our human rights policy. But there was never a coordinated, assertive lobbying program against. I guess that would have been a little hard for business to swallow, to go quite that far. I don't want to exaggerate the degree to which they were opposed to our human rights policy; it's just that they felt that we were creating frictions with the Guatemalans, Somoza, etc.

But it was much, much less than I had expected. If anything, organized labor was a little more involved, because in some countries their counterparts, locally organized labor which AFL/CIO was financially supporting, were being harassed by Somoza and other authoritarian regimes in the region.

Now, in Jamaica, I was visited on several occasions by representatives of Kaiser Aluminum and some of the other big bauxite and aluminum industries, simply to brief us as to the kinds of problems they were having with the Manley government. But in terms of asking us to do things, they rarely did. I think they felt it was more between them and Manley, although they were briefing us because they (a) wanted us to be informed, and (b) wanted us to be sympathetic in the event that we could do something to defend those interests. I don't think I ever was visited once in the two years I was DAS by anybody from United Fruit. I think I met a representative at a luncheon somewhere and became friendly with him because his daughter had worked for Senator Bentsen also, but, apart from that, I don't think so.

Q: Well, one last thing before we leave the ARA period. You've alluded to it in a number of cases, but what was your overall impression of the effectiveness, within the Department of State and all, on policy and sort of how it operated, of the Human Rights Bureau? Because this was a brand new organization, but very important in the Carter Administration.

SHELTON-COLBY: I always resist characterizing the Foreign Service as a cohesive monolithic entity, because it's not. It is as diverse as any other segment of the American population. There were certainly individuals within the Foreign Service who were very strong advocates of a tough human rights policy, particularly in Central America. But I think it's probably fair and accurate to say that the majority of the Foreign Service did not feel comfortable with the human rights policy if the results were a deterioration in what had previously been a reasonably decent working relationship. I have Central America

foursquare in mind, because I think probably the two most salient areas of concern were Korea and Central America, where the policy was most clearly felt.

Q: I was on the Country Team in Korea at the time.

SHELTON-COLBY: Oh, were you?

Q: And we were uncomfortable.

SHELTON-COLBY: I think the policy to reduce troops in South Korea was absolutely a disaster. I am a strong believer in human rights, but in South Korea, where we had important security interests, whether human rights was to be a priority or the priority was never clear.

Q: Holbrooke was the assistant secretary for Far Eastern affairs, Richard Holbrooke.

SHELTON-COLBY: In the case of Central America, there was fairly significant conflict within the Department of State, primarily between ARA, on the one hand, and HA, on the other hand, as to how hard we should deal with the Guatemalans, Somoza in Nicaragua, and the Salvadorans to improve their political and human rights situation. It seemed, Stu, as though rarely a day passed, or rarely a week passed, without some issue coming up.

One example I remember was the vice president of Guatemala, who was a friend of mine, calling me and saying, “We need tear gas because we're really having problems with the demonstrations and rioting, so could you send us down some tear gas?” My feeling was, Look, every government needs some police capability, and far better to supply them tear gas than bullets. But the difficulties are getting that request cleared. I got it through HA finally, but it went up to P for a decision.

Q: “P” being political affairs.

SHELTON-COLBY: Office of the under secretary for political affairs. Can you imagine having to take this issue to that level? But that's the way that the system worked at the time. It should be cleared at the DAS level or the assistant secretary level, in my judgement. I went up to P to have it cleared. It was late one night. And here came somebody from the HA front office, they had changed their mind and wanted to object to it. Well, P came down on the side of sending the tear gas. Some of my oldest and closest friends were in HA, but I felt they were sometimes too rigid in their views. They were not sufficiently sensitive to some of the legitimate security concerns in these countries. And they didn't know how to compromise.

Q: Well, now, you say they didn't know how to compromise. The people you were dealing with, where were they coming from, in HA?

SHELTON-COLBY: What do you mean?

Q: I mean their backgrounds.

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, of course Pat Derian, with whom I didn't really deal very much, was assistant secretary for human rights. She had two deputies, Mark Schneider and Steve Cohen. Mark had come from Senator Ted Kennedy's office, had worked on Latin America for years, and years, and had written various pieces of legislation, such as that cutting off military aid to Chile, among other things. Steve is a lawyer and had been teaching law, human rights law, perhaps. I think he'd had an academic background.

Q: So there wasn't necessarily, it was a group who...

SHELTON-COLBY: With very strong Latin American experience, and very strong views.

Q: But also very committed.

SHELTON-COLBY: Right, very committed to their particular cause, and very genuine, sincere, decent people, but, as I say, just a bit difficult to work with. Sometimes it was a challenge.

Q: Well, just a quick look at your time. You spent about three months in between working on United Nations affairs. How did you find the United Nations?

SHELTON-COLBY: Very bureaucratic.

Q: You're smiling.

SHELTON-COLBY: I worked almost exclusively on two areas. I must have spent eighty to ninety percent of my time on Cuba.

SHELTON-COLBY: Every year, some of the more conservative governments in the world, like the British, introduced a resolution to condemn Cuba. Cuba and their friends would try to block it altogether. So my mandate was to try to negotiate between the two. Remember, we had just opened Interest Sections in each other's countries. My job was to negotiate an acceptable compromise to both sides. This probably wasn't totally possible, but at least I was focused on trying to get the strongest possible resolution through, one that wouldn't outrage the Cubans.

The other ten to twenty percent of the time was spent keeping track of what other countries at the UN were thinking about doing on Nicaragua. There were some who wanted to support Somoza in his last days in power, and others who wanted to come out on the side of the “democratic forces,” that is to say, the Sandinistas.

Q: And what were you pushing?

SHELTON-COLBY: We weren't pushing anything ourselves, we weren't taking any initiative ourselves, but we wanted to be prepared in case somebody got a resolution up

for a vote. There were several resolutions in the wings but I don't recall any particular one actually coming up for a vote.

Every year, the department sends up someone from a geographic bureau to monitor issues that will be debated during the four months of the General Assembly, and to keep their geographic bureau informed, to get input as to what to do if we see that a resolution is coming up for a vote.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Andy Young, who was our ambassador at the time, was somewhat of a loose cannon? This is the impression that came, maybe not so much on Latin American affairs, but certainly on Middle Eastern affairs and African affairs.

SHELTON-COLBY: I'm very defensive of Andy; I think he is one of the greatest people I know. Which is not to say that I agree with him on everything. But, I have watched Andy operate. I did not know him before I went into the Carter Administration. I have tremendous respect for his ability to develop relationships with otherwise hostile diplomats. Absolutely unbelievable. First of all, I saw the way he was received in Mexico and Central America (remember, he's black), and the open arms and the excitement and enthusiasm that he generated. He relates to people, they can relate to him, they feel he cares about their problems. Then, of course, the Caribbean absolutely went wild over him. I saw it at the UN as well. Hostile Syrians and Palestinians and others—hostile from the left and hostile from the right—he could relate to them, he could work with them, because he's very down to earth, he doesn't have a pretentious bone in his body, he's smart, and people felt he would listen. So often we Americans tend to talk and don't listen enough, and he would listen.

Now his views were not always in sync with those of the White House. He did have an unauthorized meeting with the Palestinians. I don't remember the details of all that. I don't think it's accurate to call him a loose cannon. I do think that he was...how can I put it? I think that Andy had his own agenda, and, as a non-career ambassador, was not necessarily quite as informed of all the nuances of U.S. policy. I don't know this for a

fact, but I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't know that he was not supposed to meet with a Palestinian. He should have been fully briefed on that, but I wouldn't be surprised if he really didn't know, and it was therefore honest mistake.

Q: Okay, well let's come to your appointment as ambassador to Grenada, Barbados, and on and on and on. It was really basically the Eastern Caribbean.

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes, except for Trinidad.

Q: How did that appointment come about? By the way, you served there from 1979 to the end of the Carter Administration, in '81.

SHELTON-COLBY: I suppose my appointment came about because by that time I'd spent about ten or eleven years working on the region, first in an academic context, then with Senator Bentsen, and then, of course, my experience in the ARA front office. The other part of it was that assistant secretaries were changed, and Terry Todman, under whom I had entered, went out as ambassador to Spain, and Pete Vaky came in as assistant secretary. He wanted his own team, which is understandable, so he moved all of us to other jobs. I was offered, actually, three embassies, and I chose this one. And it proved by far to be the right choice, because of Grenada.

Q: Why did you choose it?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, for one thing, the other two embassies had one country each, and this embassy had ten different political entities. I thought it would be more interesting, because the British were withdrawing, I knew that would pose some policy dilemmas for us, and there would be some policy challenge, as opposed to the other two embassies where there really wasn't much policy challenge.

I also knew, liked, and had great respect for the Barbadians. Barbados is highly educated. The prime minister was trained as a lawyer at Oxford, and the foreign minister at

Cambridge. Both of them were among the, say, two dozen most intelligent people I've ever met in my life. And Barbados tends to be without the hangups about the United States that Mexico has. It's called Afro-Saxon, or Little England, it is so conservative. Apart from the policy challenges of dealing with the British withdrawal and the coming to independence of these very fragile systems, I felt that, philosophically I was more in tune with Barbados than with the other two countries.

Right before I went down, the Grenada Revolution occurred. I thought that would be a very exciting set of issues to work on. I really did not realize at the time, I don't think any of us did, just how difficult the Grenadians would turn out to be.

But basically that's the way it happened.

Q: What was the main American interest in that area when you went out there?

SHELTON-COLBY: I would have to say it was the traditional American concern for political stability and U.S. security in the region. In the event of an outbreak of war in Europe, seventy-five percent of our resupplies of NATO forces in Europe would go from Gulf Coast military depots, through the Caribbean, and then across the Atlantic. (I've always been curious as to why, and then I realized it is undoubtedly due to the fact that the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have traditionally been chaired by members from Mississippi and Louisiana.) So if there is one part of the world where we do have important security interests, it's the Caribbean, and, of course, Mexico and Canada. With Cuba still being provocative, and with a new leftist government in Grenada, we were getting worried. And, of course, remember that Michael Manley in Jamaica was very cozy with the Cubans.

So we didn't have substantial economic interests. Also, there were the votes in the UN that the now-independent countries would take, and, of course, in the OAS. But primarily our interests related to security.

Q: Well, then, looking at this, before we get to Grenada, because that obviously took up much of your time, were there any other problems on the security side and all in Barbados or in any of the other little democracies?

SHELTON-COLBY: We had had for years a Naval facility in Barbados, and a Naval and Air Force tracking station in Antigua. Before I got down there, we failed to reach agreement with Barbados on a renewal of the about-to-expire agreement. The Barbadians thought it was a much more important facility than it really was, and they were demanding huge amounts of money reminiscent of the Philippines. The Defense Department said we're not even in the same ballpark in terms of the rent. We said no, so the Barbadians said fine, then leave. This created a real sour taste in everybody's mouth.

Q: This had happened before you arrived?

SHELTON-COLBY: Yes, before I arrived. Pete Vaky said, The one objective that I would ask you to establish is to somehow put this behind us. He said, I don't know how you're going to do it, because real bad blood had been created, but, somehow put this behind us."

I didn't have a clue as to how I was going to go about doing it. I eventually did it, but it was touch and go. It was difficult.

Anyway, there was that specific security interest. We would have liked to have held on to that facility for a while longer, but we were extremely far apart in terms of what Barbados was demanding and what we were willing to pay.

Those talks collapsed early in '79. The Grenada Revolution occurred in March of '79, before I got down there. In fact, Pete Vaky said, "You're the only ambassador I've ever met who lost a country before she even got there."

And, in any event, Ambassador Frank Ortiz, who was my predecessor, had early difficulties with the new Grenada government. So relations between the U.S. and Grenada were tense from the very beginning.

In addition, Stu, the other countries in the region, particularly Grenada's immediate neighbors, were very worried. This was the first coup in the history of the English-speaking Caribbean, a very conservative region. It's part of the Commonwealth, with a very strong respect for the Constitution and the rule of law and order. These are very conservative people, and it came as a shock when the Grenada coup happened.

Q: Could you explain when and how it came about and what were the dynamics?

SHELTON-COLBY: Grenada had been run for years by an elected demagogue, a former Black Power advocate by the name of Eric Gairy, whose sole claim to fame was that every year he would go to the UN General Assembly and introduce a resolution to require the carrying out of a study of unidentified flying objects, UFOs, which he strongly believed in. He was extremely popular among certain sectors in Grenada because he had been a Black Power advocate. In spite of the fact that this was a very conservative, pro-U.K. and pro-Western country, he made people feel good about their blackness. That's not really mutually exclusive from being pro-U.S. and pro-U.K. But power went to his head, and power began to corrupt. He shaped a band of thugs, called the Mongoose Gang, and they roughed up a few Grenadians who opposed him, and killed the father of a man named Maurice Bishop who subsequently led the coup against him and became prime minister. Bishop was himself killed in 1983 when a radical portion of his movement turned on him.

In any event, Eric Gairy was a joke as far as the outside world was concerned, but he killed some people and brutalized more in Grenada. The Caribbean itself had done little except to cluck, cluck and wring its hands.

While Gairy was out of the country, in March of '79, the New Jewel Movement, with some support from the Cuban government and with the full knowledge of the Cuban government, moved in and took power. It was bloodless, for all practical purposes.

Again, since it was precedent-shattering, the U.S. and all the neighboring countries, with a strong commitment to the Constitution and to orderly changes of power, got very upset. There was talk in some of the neighboring countries of going in to Grenada. There was a great deal of debate within the region.

Ambassador Ortiz went over to Grenada and had some problems, in part, I think, because of the orders he had received from Washington. In essence, he and the new Grenada government basically didn't get on swimmingly, I inherited these problems.

Q: In the first place, just a little feel before we get to this, where did you run the embassy from? How did you get around? And also could you give a little feel for...this is a small embassy, your impression of its staff, its competence, and that sort of thing?

SHELTON-COLBY: Again, there are ten political entities. When I first went there, I think there were three independent countries, another four that were called associated states that were on their way to independence, and then three that were still Crown Colonies. Legally a very disparate mixture, but basically I was responsible for U.S. policy towards all ten. While I was there, another couple went independent, and seven out of the ten are now independent.

The embassy was on Barbados. I had a staff of a hundred and fifty-five plus a couple of hundred Peace Corps; that's U.S. and local. I combined my political and econ. section, and we had, I think, four people in that section: two political, one econ., and a commercial officer. We had a fairly large consular section and quite a large AID section, because AID handled regional programs for the entire Caribbean in addition to the Eastern Caribbean.

Not bilateral aid to Jamaica and the other countries, but regional programs, because one of our objectives was to try to encourage regional economic cooperation, if not integration.

One of the big challenges I had, now with the British withdrawing, was to figure out how to ensure that we did adequate coverage of political developments on the other islands. (Economic developments were less consequential; I didn't really spend too much time working on that.) It was a management nightmare in that respect. About four of the countries were not particularly problematic, but another five were, so I developed a strategy for making sure that each country was visited at least once a month by someone from my political and economic section for purposes of reporting, if not to Washington, then to me.

In terms of transportation, we all flew commercial. The regional airline is called LIAT, which was, as the joke went: Leave Island Any Time. Extremely undependable. The Defense Department said, Look, if you'll agree to create a defense attach#'s post, we'll give you your own plane. Technically, of course, it belongs to the defense attach#, but in effect an ambassador can use it any time he or she wishes. I rejected that, because while I knew I wanted to develop a security assistance program, it was to go to police forces and/or a coast guard, which people were just beginning to think about. There were few armies there, and I was afraid, frankly, if I let a defense attach# get in the door, he'd start trying to create armies. That was not in either those islands' interest or our interest. What they did need was a police capability and a coast guard. So I did get the Defense Department to agree to create a Military Liaison office, headed by a Navy SEAL, who was fantastic.

Q: SEAL (Sea, Air, and Land) being the Navy special forces.

SHELTON-COLBY: A Navy special forces person, that's right, and he was just the person I needed. He had come out of Thailand, and he had worked with a variety of European governments to help build up the Thai navy. He was exactly what we needed; he was terrific.

Q: On this, I would have thought that sort of the intelligence side would have been rather important to you, because if there are going to be problems, Cuba was still sort of over the horizon, and so no matter what votes were and all that, the real problem was: Was there subversion going on?

SHELTON-COLBY: Cuba became an issue in the second half of my time there. The Cubans came into Grenada to start building the now-famous International Airport in Grenada in late '79. And then, in early to mid-'80, I began to pick up complaints from governments of other islands that they were worried about subversive activities. More about the Grenadians than about the Cubans; the Cubans were visiting these other islands and they were doing it overtly. The other islands were not especially concerned about what the Cubans were doing overtly, but rather about what the Grenadians were doing covertly.

Q: Was there sort of a New Jewel underground going around?

SHELTON-COLBY: We could develop little hard evidence; it was mostly suspicion of what the Grenadians were doing. We had very good cooperation from various governments: the British, the Canadians, to a lesser extent the French. The French were very worried about this area because of Martinique. I would from time to time, consult with the French and very frequently with the Canadians and the British.

Q: We're moving over toward the map, here.

SHELTON-COLBY: Dominica, which is one of the islands to which I was accredited, is right between the French territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique. And, of course, the southern part of that region—Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, and Grenada—speak a French-based patois. So the French had some interest in what was happening in the region, and they were providing assistance to some of the neighboring countries. There was good, if you will, great-power coordination and cooperation and sharing of information, but it was very difficult to develop any information about what Grenada was doing.

Q: Well, now, why were the Grenadians different? How'd you deal with them, and how did you view them?

SHELTON-COLBY: The Grenadians came out of the 1960's leftist student movement at various universities like Columbia, Brandeis, New York, London School of Economics. In addition, the Black Power movement in the United States formed some of the leaders in the New Jewel Movement. Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, for example, was educated at the London School of Economics, and the number two, who's currently on trial for his life, Bernard Coard, the deputy prime minister, was educated at Brandeis. They were influenced by the radical student movements in both countries. Let us not forget that in the '50s, '60s, and even part of the '70s, much of the world was anti-U.S., hostile, pro-Third World, somewhat attracted by the Communist model, believed that the quickest way to improve people's lives was through the power of the party. The New Jewel Movement took power in '79, suspended the constitution, threw the governor-general, the Queen's representative on Grenada, in jail, suspended the parliamentary process, and governed in an authoritarian manner. They were very hostile to the United States.

Q: I assume you could get in there. Could you, or not?

SHELTON-COLBY: Oh, yes. Yes, I did. I ultimately concluded, however, that they did not want good relations with us. My instructions were to try to get along with these people, to try to improve the relationship. They raised several issues with me, and I countered their complaints with facts. They seemed to accept my explanation, or they requested a couple of things, and I said, Fine, I'll do what I can to help you solve this problem. Then, as soon as I got back to Barbados, they would be in the press, back to their old lies and myths about what we were and were not doing.

Would you like me to give you a couple of examples?

Q: Sure, please do.

SHELTON-COLBY: They argued, for example, that the U.S. refused to give Grenada any economic assistance because we didn't like their government. I said, Look, the facts are that we have no bilateral programs anywhere in the region. Nowhere. But we're putting (I forget what the figure was now) forty million dollars a year into the region. This may not sound like a lot of money, but Grenada has eighty-five thousand people on it. I can't prove it, but I suspect that Grenada, because they had attracted back a number of Grenadian technicians—economists, agronomists, accountants, and doctors, etc., was probably drawing down from the various international financial institutions more than any other island in the region. I would point out that as a matter of fact, that project and this project and the other project here in Grenada (pointing to development projects) are all projects funded by U.S. aid, channeled through the World Bank, and the Caribbean Development Bank. And they accepted that while I was in the room with them. Then I'd go back to Barbados, and they'd go back on the radio and TV, saying, The U.S. refuses to give us any economic assistance. In other words, they wanted to perpetuate this lie, because they wanted to feel set upon by the United States.

Another example: My staff and I felt that they were genuinely concerned about Eric Gairy, who was in the States, who claimed to be organizing a force to come back and retake Grenada. Frankly, we didn't want Eric Gairy to come back; he had killed people and abused others. We felt, frankly, that if this group could ever get over its anti-U.S. hostility, it probably would do a pretty good job of running the country, because they were very educated and skilled men, intelligent in spite of their biases. But they convinced us that they really were genuinely worried about Eric Gairy, and they wanted us to extradite him. I said, Well, you can't just ask to extradite him, and then we act. The process of extradition is very complicated. I said, But let me tell you what I can do. In very rare cases the Justice Department, when we want to extradite someone, will send someone down to the country in question and help them prepare a legal case, which will be strong enough that we can extradite the person. Now that isn't done very often, and it's done very quietly, but Justice agreed to do it in this case. So I said, Let me get somebody from Justice down here to

help you prepare a case, because he will know what will fly in U.S. courts, and you don't know what will fly in U.S. courts.

They said, Terrific. Very grateful.

So I went back and got someone from Justice to come down. He cooled his heels on Grenada for three or four days, and the government would never see him. Finally, he called me, and I said, Go home. That tells me something.

They continued to flail at us for supporting Eric Gairy and supporting his efforts to come back and retake power. Nothing could have been further from the truth. They didn't want to get help from the U.S. to prepare a case that would stand up in U.S. courts for extradition; they just wanted to have an issue with which to beat us over the head.

I can go on and on with this kind of thing. They wanted to perpetuate all kinds of lies and myths. To this day there are still a few people around who believe the Grenadians rather than us, even though I've testified repeatedly on these issues.

Q: One can't do this interview without knowing the future history of where in '83 we actually went into the island. While you were doing it, did we see this as anything more than sort of something we hoped would work out, and we didn't see this as becoming a real focus of our military?

SHELTON-COLBY: After something of an effort, Stu, which I partially described, to improve the relationship with them, the decision was taken in Washington, against my recommendation, to disengage from Grenada. Neither I nor my DCM could go to Grenada unless explicitly authorized. At a fairly low junior-officer level, it did not need advance authorization. I felt that was wrong, because I felt it was important to keep trying, but also I felt it was important for the ambassador and the DCM to stay engaged with non-governmental sectors in Grenada. But that was Washington's decision, and I simply lost that battle. So we basically disengaged, and we developed a policy of trying to build up all

the neighboring countries to show what the neighboring countries that were still democratic and friendly could achieve with us. It was a little hard to do—again, because we had no bilateral programs. I recommended at that point bilateral programs to give me more tools than I had. That decision was subsequently taken, but in the Reagan Administration, and I was already gone. So, as I recollect, there was no consideration given whatsoever to actually invading, because short of a good reason, there really wasn't one. They were hostile, but a lot of governments are hostile, including the Mexicans and sometimes the Canadians. It was after I left that we really began to develop some evidence that the Grenadians were actually training citizens of other islands in subversive tactics. And then, of course, there was an internal revolt, or split, within the ruling New Jewel movement, and the more radical element killed the more moderate prime minister, Maurice Bishop. Washington became concerned about the safety of American students at a medical college in Grenada.

Q: Was the medical college established when you were there?

SHELTON-COLBY: It was there; it had been there for a long time.

Q: Did you have any concern about this?

SHELTON-COLBY: No, I didn't.

Q: My understanding, I may be wrong... How did you describe the medical college?

SHELTON-COLBY: There are any number of medical schools in other countries attended by Americans who can't get into medical schools in the States. The head of the medical college, Geoffrey Bourne, an Englishman, I knew quite well and was very friendly with, along with his son, who was a White House official. They were English by origin, naturalized American citizens. He constantly was reassuring me that he had a very good relationship with the Grenada government. The students were constantly reassuring me, when I would visit with any of them, that they did not feel in any danger whatsoever.

The Grenadian government left them totally alone. So I did not perceive there being any particular threat to them. Of course, there was no violence while I was there.

Q: Well, looking at this then, were there any other major concerns? We've covered an awful lot, really, about this, but were there any other major concerns in the whole area?

SHELTON-COLBY: Well, some minor concerns. In Saint Vincent there was a coup attempt during this period. In Saint Lucia we had quite a lot of problems, because a conservative government was voted out, and a somewhat radical, though deeply divided, government was voted in; part of that government was quite close to the Cubans. There was tremendous political instability in Dominica as a thug-run government fell, replaced by a very unskilled and unstable government, part of which had close relations with the Cubans.

So the other part of the area, that is to say, the other islands of the Windwards, had their own forms of instability, although generally within a kind of electoral context. The Caribbean's drift to the left was worrisome to me. Remember Manley in Jamaica. Then, of course, at one point, there was a coup in Suriname, and a conservative, pro-Western government was overthrown by a leftist group there. I think that was in '79 also.

Let me give you one small example of our concerns. Shortly after I got there, Hurricane David smashed into the area and badly damaged Dominica. We mounted a huge relief operation; we had four U.S. military services down there rebuilding the country. A lot of people were killed. I was flying back and forth in charter planes, sometimes in U.S. military planes that came down from Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico. I was flying back and forth, because you couldn't get a commercial flight in there, coordinating this whole operation. The U.S. military did a spectacular job with this emergency, first with an emergency relief operation, and then with a reconstruction operation. I tell you, if there are any saints walking on earth, it's the SEABEES. I mean, they are just fantastic, the Navy construction brigades.

But, in any event, at one point somebody in the Dominican government called me and said, You can ask all of your military to leave, because the Cubans are going to come in and they're going to take over, and we want you all out. This was a cabinet minister. I didn't believe him, because I knew the government was divided philosophically. I said, I will certainly adhere to the wishes of the government of Dominica, (as opposed to one individual) but, I said, I would like to have that in writing. As a matter of fact, he called me from Havana. Of course, the written request never came, because he was speaking for himself, not for the government of Dominica.

There were those kinds of pressures on us from the left. We had, frankly, incompetent government in some countries in the region, which worried us. So it was the combination of inefficient government and instability, together with an aggressive Cuba, that had us all very worried.

Q: What about when the Reagan Administration came in? You said you served about six months of it?

SHELTON-COLBY: I think I left in May of the first year of the Reagan Administration. I stayed on for a short while to continue to work on these issues, because it was so turbulent in the region.

Q: When the Reagan Administration came in, they had some very fixed ideas on Latin America. Not so much Reagan himself, but sort of the staff around him. Did you feel a dramatic change in the atmosphere and all for your particular area?

SHELTON-COLBY: Not really, I was only focusing on the Eastern Caribbean. The changes that they embraced, I frankly very much welcomed, because they wanted to go with bilateral assistance, which I had been arguing for. And that was the only sort of substantive change, at least initially.

Q: They were focused elsewhere at that point, anyway; it was Central America.

SHELTON-COLBY: That's right, Central America, exactly.

Q: So you didn't feel sort of the cold wrath of the Administration coming in and cleansing the temple or anything like that.

SHELTON-COLBY: No, I really didn't. They subsequently made some policy choices that I didn't fully agree with, but I wasn't strongly in disagreement either.

Ambassadors can really set the tone as much by style as by policy content. I don't want to identify either the country or the person, but I saw one situation in which an ambassador didn't really want to go to his particular country. He felt it was beneath him, he felt he was destined for bigger and better countries. But he went, and people sensed that he really didn't like them, and didn't want to be there. And they couldn't stand him. To this day one hears stories coming out of that country about this particular ambassador and the gaffes he made and how he didn't like them, and people still resent this all these years later. The person who followed him, perhaps not through any particular merits of his own, but I think genuinely liked the people and genuinely was interested in the people and engaged in the issues, and people could relate to him. And I don't think the policy content was particularly different between the two ambassadors, but they liked the second one. I think both of them were equally skilled at representing U.S. policy, but the first one's style was off-putting, while the second one, to this day, remains very popular.

So, part of it's stylistic, again, to the extent that the ambassador listens and tries to shape a U.S. policy which is responsive to various concerns. Now, obviously, our priority is to protect our interests, not to protect theirs, but sometimes there's an overlap between our interests and their's.

Q: There usually is. Well, shall we call it, do you think?

SHELTON-COLBY: I think so. Don't you think we've wrapped everything up?

Q: I think so. Thank you very much, this has been fascinating.

End of interview